THE
NEW YORK LEDGER
DEVOTED TO CHOICE LITERATURE ROMANCE THE NEWS COMMERCE

SATURDAY, APRIL 13, 1872.

"PENNED IN."

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It was Monday morning—a clear, sunshiny morning—fair enough in February to be well appreciated by all good housekeepers. And so it was with little Mrs. Swifton, who, busy and earnest in her endeavors to facilitate Bridget's motions and get out the clothes to catch the sunshine, was just starching baby's embroideries, when the hall bell sounded. Darting quickly into the sitting-room, which was occupied by a friend visiting her, Mary Swifton exclaimed:

"Jennie, do look out through the blinds and see who is at the door."

"There is a private carriage, and the footman is waiting at your door," Jennie replied.

"O dear, dear, it is Mrs. Courtney! Of all persons in the world, the last I should be glad to see just now. Run, Bridget, and say I am not at home—gone out," said Mrs. Swifton.

"Oh, Mollie! don't, dear!"

"I must, Jennie; I cannot see her. Go on, Bridget. There's the bell again; run. Say I'm not in; and I'll make it the truth, by running out in the yard and putting up baby's dresses."

Suiting the action to her words, Mary Swifton ran out, returning a few moments after, when she had heard the carriage roll away.

"Well, Bridget?" she asked anxiously.

"Well, Ma'am, I didn't have to say you tould me to say you were out; for the black fellow poked this into me hands, bobbed his head, and was off, sure, without the saying of a word by either of us," Bridget replied.

"Ah, I am glad we were saved from telling that little fib," Mary Swifton said, receiving from the girl's hand the envelope.

"But, Mollie, how about the intention?" asked Jennie.

"Oh, stop, you straight-laced little tease! It was utterly impossible for me to receive Mrs. Courtney, the most fashionable of all my acquaintances, in this dress. And I could not have kept her waiting so long as it would have taken me to don a suitable garb. If I had sent word I was engaged, that would have mortally offended her. So what could I do else? But I am truly glad I did not have to tell—what you want to call it this moment, I see—a white lie. Here are cards of invitation to a reception she gives her sister, who was married a few days ago. What do you want to say? I see from your eyes you are not done with this subject."

"I want to tell you my experience relative to 'white lies,' or rather the one which the result of made me take a vow never to have recourse to anything of the kind again. Now to-day I would have, if in your place, simply put on one of those pretty white aprons, and gone in the parlor to receive Mrs. Courtney or Mrs. anybody. You look neat and home-like, and if any one is too fashionable to like you so, I would not care how soon I lost their friendship, particularly if it was founded on so very changeable a basis. But go on now, and you will soon be at leisure. Then I will give you my story."

"All right, Jennie. I wish I could feel as you do, but I cannot, to save me," Mary said, as she hurried off.

An hour after, she returned with her work basket, and seating herself near her friend, said:

"Now for it, Jennie, dear."

Jennie, folding her work, put it aside, saying:

"I never can do two things well at once. And as neither my story nor sewing will admit of a slight, I must give my particular attention to the lesson I have for you. At the time of my story William was book-keeper for the firm of Stearns, Sharp and Co. We had been married about a year, when he came home to dinner one day looking very much worried. He eat but little, and after sitting with his head on his hand for some time, he said:

"'Jennie, love, you must put on your things, go down to the store, and tell Mr. Stearns that I am too sick to work this afternoon, and unless I feel very differently, not to-morrow. It is too bad that you must go. If Stearns was not such an exacting old fellow it would not be necessary. But you know just what he is.'

"I did know. Nothing but illness or death was ever an excuse for a half-day's absence. Why, even on election days, those who voted with him *might* get a couple of hours off. The others, if they voted, had to devote the hour allotted to dinner to that purpose. I suppose I looked uneasy, for William said:

"'Now don't look as if I was going to die, Jennie. I think a few hours' rest from those old ledgers will quite relieve me. You need not fatigue yourself hurrying back. Mother will be here in a few moments. I called and asked her to come round. As all are from home, she had just as well remain to-night with you.'

"I hurried off, and was feeling still uneasy about the result of William's sickness, when

I met his mother.

"'Do you think William is going to be very ill, mother?' I asked.

"'No, indeed, child. He may be going to have one of his spells of headache, and may be not that. You don't know him as well as I. Don't worry. You'll find him no worse when you get back, I think.'

"Notwithstanding all this, I *did* feel worried. I delivered my message to Mr. Stearns, who, to my immense surprise and agreeable disappointment, said:

"'Ah, indeed! Well, I thought he looked rather serious when he left. I am sorry about his sickness, and if I can be of any service to him or you, call on me, my child. But don't be uneasy. I think he is only a little overworked.'

"I suppose there was something in my face that, seeing, touched his heart. I felt almost like putting my arms around the dear old man, and kissing him.

"I told William, after that I should never join the cry about Stearns' hardness.

"When I returned home, I found William no worse than when I left, indeed rather improved in condition. I judged by the surrounding appearances a great surprise awaited me, of which I shall keep you in ignorance for the present. In the mean time, you will please consider William, although not ill, still not well enough to return to the store.

Just imagine him being lovingly cared for that night, and through the next day. Mother was still with me, cheering me as best she could, telling her merry stories, laughing away my fears, and constantly assuring me William was all right.

“‘If any of the boys from the store come round, tell them I'm too sick to be seen. I must have quiet,’ William had said.

“But no one had been to inquire.

“It was about eight o'clock, the second night. The servant had asked permission to go home for an hour; so mother and I were sitting in the parlor, anxiously listening for the door bell. Soon it sounded. I was about to run out and answer it, when a word of whispered caution from mother arrested me. Listening, I heard a strange voice ask:

“‘How is Mr. Laurence to-night?’

“Without the least hesitation then, mother replied:

“‘About the same as yesterday, thank you, sir.’

“‘Ah, I am glad to hear he is no worse. I will see him, if you please, madam.’

“‘You cannot see him, sir,’ mother answered firmly.

“‘But I must see him, madam; I have business with him,’ in a quiet, determined tone from the man.

"'A sick man cannot be expected to attend to business. And you cannot see him to-night. It is necessary to keep everything very quiet, and not disturb him at all,' mother said, waxing a little wrathy at the man's persistency.

"'Madam, my business is with sick men. It is my duty to see him—'

"'And it is mine not to let you,' mother interrupted him by saying.

"I was standing just in the parlor door. I think the man might have heard my heart beating, if he had stopped to listen. I was so frightened, thinking how would it all end!

"'I shall not disturb him, madam. Indeed I am more likely to compose and quiet him, I think,' the man answered, in a tone as if to assure her of two things at once: his determination to see William, and the result of his visit.

"'Indeed, sir! Well, *I* have not found you a very composing object.'

"'I'm sorry, madam. But I think my presence will have a happier effect on my friend. Will you at least be kind enough to take up my name to him? I'm sure he will like to see me.'

"A half minute more, and mother came in, holding the dreadful man's card. I am laughing now; but you can scarcely imagine the dreadful suspense I was in during those few moments, which seemed almost hours to me.

If you could have seen mother's face, the perfect dismay pictured there, as she whispered:

"'What *shall* we do? That boy will be the death of me yet. Dear me! I'm ready to faint now. I won't go out to talk to him again.'

"I went forward then, a kind of forlorn hope. An idea for relief had entered my brain. I thought I would get a good look at the tormenting individual, and then decide. Turning on the gas, I asked him to be seated.

"One look sufficed. I knew that man believed it was his duty to see my husband, if possible; and he would do it, or know the reason why he could not.

"'May I inquire your business, sir? I am Mrs. Laurence; and if you will be so kind, I can better decide what to say about your seeing him,' I said, in the most pleasant manner I could command.

"'Certainly, madam. I am very willing to explain my business, and relieve you of any anxiety; for I think there has been a good deal of unnecessary excitement already about the matter. I am one of the visiting committee of the Brothers of Temperance. When it came to my knowledge, the illness of Brother Laurence, it became my duty to see him and know if he was ill, and whether the sum paid a sick member would be acceptable. So, madam, I am here for that purpose, and hope you will allow me to proceed with my business.'

"The brother answered affably enough, and firmly enough too. A despairing glance from mother, then a moment's hesitation on my part, when in desperation I asked:

"'Sir—ah, excuse me—but what are your politics? Are you for White, or Gray?'

"It was at the time of the governor's election. The awful man answered civilly and readily:

"'Certainly, madam. I will tell you that too.'

"But his eyes were inquiring plain enough:

"'What, in the name of common-sense, has that to do with the sick man?'

"'I am very desirous for the election of White, and shall vote for him.'

"My heart gave a bound of joy and relief. My way was easy enough. And I said, glad to tell the truth then:

"'Mr. Laurence is not sick at all, I trust, sir. But he is out of town, electioneering for White. I am looking for his return every moment. Yesterday he received a letter from his uncle, saying that there was much fear of the greater number of the men in the factories going the wrong way. And that unless William could come out and contradict the prejudicial reports, most likely White would lose the vote. William has great influence with the men, so he determined to go. He knew it would be worse than useless to ask a day's holiday of Mr. Stearns, and so he played sick.'

"'All right, madam, perfectly right. I should have done just the same, and I have no doubt that news from L—— caused him to feel heart sick at the time. I am very sorry to have caused you ladies so much uneasiness,' Mr. Jones said.

"But mother was not so speedily to be won over to good-humor. She had suffered too much uneasiness and mortification for that. She sat, giving anything but smiles to our visitor, when a quick, familiar step caused me to run out into the hall and welcome William. He came in looking anything but as we had reported him an hour before. Mother started up, and then sank back in her chair, to faint—or feint, I thought—for when the temperance brother said:

"'Get a glass of water. Sprinkle a little in her face;'

"His words recalled her to perfect consciousness, for she exclaimed:

"'Don't you dare! Get me a glass of wine. You have already been almost the death of me with your temperance doings. And now you want to finish me, I believe! I'll have nothing more to do with you temperance folks, I vow.'

"I vowed from that night never to tell, or allow myself to be drawn into telling, a white lie. And I've kept that vow thus far. I soon procured mother the desired relieving glass, and we were all, soon after, laughing over the experience of the evening."

"Well, Jennie," said Mary, "I don't think it likely I shall ever be caught in just such an embarrassing situation; still it is a bad habit to allow one's self to fall into, and I shall try to drop it immediately. Your story not only gives a lesson, but is really very amusing, and it has done me good. I want to hear Harry laugh over it to-night, when he returns from the store. Now I must to work again."